H. S. r. Jol.

Rhodora

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Yours Sincerely Yours
John Robinson

Rhodora

JOURNAL OF

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 31. December, 1929. No. 372.

JOHN ROBINSON, BOTANIST, OF SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

ALBERT P. MORSE

(With portrait)[1]

It was with a distinct shock that I learned, when appealed to from Washington for information, that no sketch of John Robinson's botanical work—nor, indeed, a biography of any sort—had ever appeared in any scientific journal, not even mention of his death. This unfortunate oversight was probably but the natural consequence of his having outlived most of his contemporary workers and the fact that for thirty years previous to his death his activities had been confined almost exclusively to other channels.

It seems wise, therefore, even at this late date, to publish an outline of the work of a New England botanist prominent locally in the '80's of the last century, together with as complete a list as practicable of his botanical writings.

This brief sketch of what might be termed his botanical biography is based on the account printed in the daily press at the time of his death,[2] on notes imparted to me from time to time by its subject and his acquaintances, and upon an autobiographical sketch which he prepared for his family, for access to which I am greatly indebted to them and from which I have freely quoted.

John Robinson, Keeper of the Marine Room of the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, died suddenly of heart failure at his home in Salem, April 9, 1925, in his 79th year.

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[1] From photograph in Peabody Museum, dating from about the time of his greatest botanical activity.

[2] Salem Evening News, April 10, 1925.

He was born in Salem, July 13th, 1846, the son of John and Lucy Pickering (Stone) Robinson. His father had died several months previously, leaving his mother in comfortable circumstances. At the time of his birth he was an only child and being of somewhat delicate physique his childhood was of sheltered character.

Nominally, he was educated in private elementary and the public grammar and high schools of Salem, supplemented, after withdrawal from the high school owing to its unsettled condition due to the war, by additional private lessons and by courses in botany at Harvard College. But as he himself said, "his education lacked system and did not actively begin until he had left schools behind."

He had no inclination toward college, and no effort was made to arouse an interest in a college career, nor authority exercised to force him to attend. This lack of a college training and associations he regretted, feeling that he had missed an experience that would have enriched his life, equipped him better for his work, and supplied something of which he felt the lack when too late to secure it.

While not compelled to work, when nineteen years old he became a clerk in the commission house of Alden Speare, Boston, dealing in oils, candles, and starch. Here he became acquainted with the business methods of the day, learned to meet all sorts of people, practiced his arithmetic and geography, and found it a far better school than any he had ever attended. He remained in this position for several years, practically until he became connected with the Peabody Museum (at that time named the Peabody Academy of Science), with which the rest of his life was bound up to a degree impossible to realize except by those directly associated with him in his later years.

As a boy he "best liked dabbling in natural science and history"; and these pursuits later became the dominant ones. At an early age he fell under the influence of Dr. Henry Wheatland of Salem, "whose main object in life was the development of the Essex Institute"; joined the Institute at the age of fifteen, and when seventeen years old was appointed curator of the relics of the Civil War and later of the entire historical department. "It was Dr. Wheatland's influence, his truthfulness and constant encouragement which gave Robinson his start in natural science and local history and maintained his interest in museum work. To make a boy of seventeen a curator in a department of a recognized public institution and to trust him with the entire responsibility of the collections in that department, was more binding than chains and safer than locks to keep him at his job; it engendered pride in the trust shown in him, it created the spirit which lasted and went with him in all his institutional work through life."

In childhood he had learned the names of all the flowers in the gardens about. During the train rides to and from Boston while clerking it he read Gray's Lessons in Botany, Dana's Geology, and kindred books. On Sundays he took botanical rambles in the nearby country, and in the summer vacation visited the White Mountains, where he discovered at the Crystal Cascade in 1865 a fern (*Aspidium fragrans*) not then reported from New England. His interest in plants led him to make inquiries regarding certain ones at Harvard College and the Botanic Garden, thereby becoming acquainted with the botanists there, of whom Professor Asa Gray was the leading spirit, with the result that he took the last summer course in botany given by Professor Gray, the first by his successor, Professor George L. Goodale, and a winter course in cryptogamic botany at the Bussey Institution under Dr. W. G. Farlow, attending also his lectures on the subject in the regular college course.

"In 1874 he took charge of the herbarium of the Peabody Museum" (which had been received from the Essex Institute at the time of its founding), the arrangement of which had been left unfinished by Cyrus M. Tracy of Lynn. "This work on the plants of the County inspired a desire to improve and so far as possible complete the collection and publish a catalog of the County flora. After six years of preparatory work the catalog was printed in 1880 and contained, besides, many notes and locality descriptions. It was the first catalog of its character of any local flora, nearly all previously issued being hardly more than lists of plants." In the preparation of this work Robinson was greatly aided by local botanists and specialists (e. g., Chas. J. Sprague,—lichens; F. S. Collins,—marine algae), and had the personal assistance of Caleb Cooke, John H. Sears, and W. P. Conant in collecting and determining specimens. (See acknowledgments in the Flora, pp. 25, 26, 115, 137, 146, 149, 157.) It included not only the phanerogams and vascular cryptogams but also the mosses, stoneworts, lichens and marine algae. It enumerated 673 genera, 1694 species, and 140 varieties from the County.

During its preparation Robinson published papers on the ferns of Essex County, a list of North American ferns, and a volume on the cultivation of ferns entitled "Ferns in Their Homes and Ours" which met with a warm reception and ran through several editions.

Robinson contributed to the collections of the Peabody Museum over 1000 sheets of Essex County plants and nearly as many of ferns and lycopods from all parts of the world, besides numerous miscellaneous lots from various collectors. He gathered an extremely interesting and complete series of specimens to illustrate the County woods and woody plants, nuts, etc., and prepared a paper on the woody plants of Essex County which came to the attention of Professor Charles S. Sargent of the Arnold Arboretum, thereby leading to a valued and lifelong friendship. In fact, Professor Sargent induced Robinson to accept a position as assistant in the Arboretum in charge of the herbarium, a position which he filled for two years and a half.

Robinson was also interested and active in the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and served as the honorary "Professor of Botany" of that organization for several years. With Sargent's assistance he prepared two papers on arboriculture which he read before the Horticultural Society and the State Board of Agriculture.

In June, 1875, Robinson was chosen a trustee of the Peabody Academy of Science and in October was made its treasurer and given practical charge of the museum, Dr. A. S. Packard being the scientific director. On the opening of the Summer School of Biology of the Academy at Salem by Dr. Packard, in 1876, Robinson conducted the botanical courses, and again in 1877. This led to his delivering botanical lectures before various schools and clubs in the vicinity of Salem and forming a botanical class at the Museum, which he conducted for several years.

It was during this period of botanical activity that he met (1870) Charles Faxon and began a lifelong friendship with him and other members of his family, a friendship which lasted till the death of Faxon in 1919. Faxon's scientific work and attainments ever called forth the sincere admiration of Robinson. Another of his intimates at this time was the Rev. E. C. Bolles of Salem, later of New York and of Tufts College, with whom he botanized, who aided him with criticism and advice while preparing his fern book, and aroused his interest in micro-botany.

Relative to his personal predilections in the botanical field, Robinson writes, in the third person:—"He never found a plant new to botanical literature[1] nor rearranged the specific or generic limits of those already known. His interest in botany was in outdoor observations, and he detested 'closet-work.'[2] Physiological botany and morphology, not the dry descriptive indoor work, was what he enjoyed. He had a supreme contempt for the continual disarrangement and rearrangement of names; and the confusion that the nomenclaturists seemingly gloated over in pages of discussions over 'rights of priority' by which established names were thrown aside for forgotten ones,—this thoroughly disgusted him. The study of the structure and development of plants seemed more worth while and the plants themselves in the field more interesting through microscopic studies, so much so that, later, he cared little to collect them for herbarium preservation."

From the time of Robinson's election as treasurer of the Museum in 1875 he had exercised more or less control over its affairs, and when Dr. Packard resigned in 1878 he was appointed director *pro tempore.* Professor Edward S. Morse was elected director in 1880 and while he was absent in Japan and during his lecture tours and leaves of absence in later years, Robinson officiated as acting-director, the duties of which position he discharged for many years, practically until the present assistant-director, Mr. L. W. Jenkins, was placed in charge in 1914.

During this time his attention and labors were of necessity distributed over various fields, from botany and general natural history to ethnology and archaeology, as required by the needs of the moment. At the outset of this period his old mentor, Dr. Wheatland, had said that "to do justice to the museum as a whole he must give up the idea of specializing in any department; that a museum usually reflected the interest of the curator, and that there was always a danger that the dominance of this interest would be to the injury of the balance of the institution," a truth which Robinson soon found out; and he says: "No better advice . . . can be offered to a museum housekeeper. More museums are wrecked by a too eminent scientist at their head than by curators who hold no seats in the temples of the savants."

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[1] Robinson should be credited, however, with the colloquial name "Christmas Fern" applied to *Polystichum acrostichoides;* and for the varietal name "*Phippenii*" proposed for the salmon-colored form of *Aquilegia canadensis.* (Flora E. Co., p. 30).

[2] An excellent example of the sort of work that attracted him is the series of letters contributed to the Salem Gazette and later published by the Essex Institute under the title of "Our Trees." Another, which his modesty led him to think not worth publishing, is the article on "Plants growing the first season in an uncovered cellar." Rhodora, vol. 28 (1926), p. 69–74.

Toward the end of the century historical marine material began to accumulate and as it did Robinson took charge of it and developed the Marine Room with customary efficiency and success. This work occupied the major part of his time and interest until his death. The dedication of the new marine hall to be opened shortly as John Robinson Hall will be but a suitable testimonial to his activity in this field.

Robinson collected coins and curiosities as a child and had a cabinet of such when but eight years old. This interest never left him but in later years was confined to the coinage of the Far East. At the same time he amassed a good library on the subject and in 1913 gave both coins and books (about 3400 coins and 500 books and papers) to the Essex Institute as a memorial of his father and mother, publishing privately at the time a catalog of the library.

Feeling the need of a good historical guide-book for Salem, he compiled,—with Thomas Franklin Hunt, then in charge of the Essex Institute,—the "Visitor's Guide to Salem," first published by the Institute in 1892, which has had a large sale, amounting to nearly 60,000 copies. To this, in its various editions, Robinson alone contributed the sections on the Peabody Museum and the biographical sketch of Hawthorne in Salem.

A man of his versatility and attainments was naturally called upon to serve the community in various ways. He was a member at various times of the common council, the school board, the sewer commission, the board of health of Salem; trustee of the Salem Hospital, Public Library, Ropes Memorial, Bertram Home for Aged Men, East India Marine Society, and Salem Athenaeum. He belonged to the Sons of the American Revolution, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, American Museums Association, Essex Institute, several numismatic clubs, and many other organizations of similar character.

As a person versed in horticulture, it was inevitable that his advice should be sought relative to the laying out of gardens, and he gave freely of his time and interest in that direction. He planned those of the Salem Club in 1895 and of the Ropes Memorial in 1912. In fact, it is not too much to say that to his botanical and historical knowledge, good taste, practical sense, and warm interest the Ropes Memorial owes what it is today. His own garden, at his home in Salem, was a most attractive spot in which to work, play, or dream, and he had labored in it on the day of his death.

Mr. Robinson married, in 1869, Miss Elizabeth Robbins Kemble of Wenham, who survives him, as do also a son, John Robinson, Jr., two daughters, Mrs. Richard Wheatland and Mrs. John Bertram Ropes of Salem, and eight grandchildren.

To those who never had the good fortune to meet Mr. Robinson, to experience his genial courtesy, rare tact and charm of manner, intuitive perception and appreciation of altruistic motives, it may be said that these characteristic qualities and his whole-hearted devotion to the work which came to him to do, were an inspiration. And by those who were associated with him the memory of his friendship will ever be treasured among the finer things that life has brought.

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Peabody Museum,
Salem, Massachusetts.

Propagation by Seed in Hydrangea.—Apropos the writer's note on *Hydrangea paniculata*, Sieb. as naturalized in Massachusetts,[1] Dr. Theo. Holm has recently suggested,[2] that propagation by root-shoots (stolons) is more likely than by seed.

When the Lincoln station was first discovered last year, a superficial and unsuccessful search was made for unmistakable seedlings. Early in the following December, some seed was collected from open capsules still persisting on the frost-bitten panicles. Through the courtesy of Mr. Alfred Rehder, a germination test of this seed was made at the Arnold Arboretum. It proved to be normally viable.

[1] Rhodora, xxxi, 18, 1929.
[2] Ibid, xxxi, 120, 1929.

This autumn, a more thorough search at the Lincoln station yielded several small plants, apparently seedlings, ranging from 1–3 dm. high. These were carefully lifted and examined for possible evidence of stoloniferous origin, without success. No "runners" or "root-shoots" were discernable. In one instance, a small seedling bore a prostrate branch of second year growth, which had rooted freely at the nodes. This was an instance, doubtless, of natural "layering," which suggests an alternative method of reproduction, although nothing of the sort was found to occur on the mature shrubs. Representative specimens of these seedlings have been deposited in the Gray Herbarium.

Although the writer would not presume to assert that propagation by stolons does not occur in this species, he has been unable to find any evidence to this effect in the plants under his observation.—R. J. Eaton, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

NOTE ON TRISETUM SPICATUM.—In a short article on *Aira spicata* L., Mr. K. K. Mackenzie[1] states that *Aira spicata* (*Trisetum spicatum*) is invalidated by *A. spicata* published on the preceding page. One fact should be added to Mr. Mackenzie's statement. In the "Errata" at the end of the second volume of the Species Plantarum Linnaeus changes *Aira* 1. *spicatum* to *indicum*. The first volume of the Species Plantarum was published in May, the second in August.[2] According to the American Code (Canon 13) the second *Aira spicata* (*Trisetum*) is a homonym and hence invalid. Some botanists may accept Linnaeus' own correction as if originally the first *A. spicata* read *A. indica*, in which case the second *A. spicata* is valid. Under the the International Rules (Article 50) the second *Aira spicata* (*Trisetum spicatum*) is valid because the first *A. spicata* is universally regarded as non-valid. Furthermore priority of position for names published on the same date is not recognized by the International Rules and Linnaeus' correction, even though at a later date, would validate the second *A. spicata*.—A. S. Hitchcock, Washington, D. C.

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[1] Rhodora **31**: 194. 1929.

[2] Richter, Codex Bot. Linn. xxx. 1835; Jackson, Journ. Bot. Brit. & For. **61**: 174. 1923.

SOME LOCAL PLANTS OF VIRGINIA

F. W. Hunnewell

The Shenandoah Valley today is too well cultivated and given up to farms and orchards to make it especially inviting ground for a botanist. But occasionally there are places where the underlying limestone comes to the surface making the ground too rough and rocky for the farmer. This is so where Cedar Creek crosses the main highway, the Valley "Pike," about thirteen miles south of Winchester in Frederick County, the northwesternmost county in Virginia.

On the north bank of this creek are a series of low rocky, wooded hills, in places with almost precipitous cliffs of limestone rising one hundred feet above the edge of the stream. Here on October 19, 1864 was fought the Battle of Cedar Creek, these hills having been fortified by the Union army and still plainly showing the old line of trenches.

In the early spring the banks of the creek present a beautiful sight with trilliums, *Mertensia virginica* and *Delphinium tricorne*, while higher up the hillsides are covered with *Cercis canadensis* and *Cornus florida*. It is along the dry rocky tops of these hills that I have found some plants which I think may be worth recording.

In several places growing beneath the pines, and giving much the same effect as *Arctostaphylos Uva-ursi* in our New England woods are large patches of *Pachystima Canbyi* Gray. How common this is in Virginia I do not know. In Gray's Manual its range is given as "Mts. of s. Va. and W. Va." and the only specimens in the Gray Herbarium are from Wythe and Giles counties in the southern part of the state and about 170 miles to the southwest. Scattered through these woods is also growing *Parthenium auriculatum* Britton, described by him in the first edition of his "Illustrated Flora" as from the "Mts. of Virginia." In general appearance it is quite distinct from *P. integrifolium* L. and resembles more closely *P. repens* Eggert of Missouri and Kansas, but differs from the latter in having a thick tuberous root.

A third plant is *Astragalus distortus* T. & G. which I believe has not been recorded before from Virginia. This is a plant of the Mississippi valley, west to Texas, the only other recorded station in the East being Moorefield in Hardy County, West Virginia, the adjoining county on the other side of the mountains. A thorough search revealed only a few plants, all growing in dry sunny places among the limestone rocks.

"BELLE GROVE," MEADOW MILLS, VIRGINIA.

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ERRATA

Cover-page 1, no. 361, for **Editoral**, read **Editorial**
Page 14, line 28, for *Medeala*, read *Medeola*
" 32, " 31, *for* 10.7, *read* 1.07
" 37, " 9, for **brevifolia** read **brevifolium**
" 39, " 25, *for* simple, *read* ample
" 43, " 19, *for* sepcimens, *read* specimens
" 47, " 42, *for* borowed, *read* borrowed
" 48, " 27, for NERVATA, read STRIATA
" 53, " 4, for **albiligulata**, read **albiligulatus**
" 53, " 13, for CANADENSE, read CANADENSIS
" 55, " 6, for *Cypripediums*, *read* cypripediums
" 95, " 29, *for* Lyonia, read *Lyonia*
" 109, " 5, *for* Hitchcock & Chase, *read* Hitchcock
" 141, " 7, of foot-note, for *virginiana*, read *virginica*
" 142, " 17, for *triolius*, read *trifolius*
" 172, " 6, of foot-note, for *pauciflorus*, read *pauciflora*
" 174, " 3, for *paucifloras*, read *pauciflora*
" 174, " 8, for *pauciflorus*, read *pauciflora*
" 203, " 22, *for* Copiepo, *read* Copiapo
" 216, " 10, *before* should, *insert* I
" 235, " 9, *for* Kukenthal, read Kükenthal
" 237, " 7, for *ocreatus*, read *ocreata*
" 237, " 8, *for* Neeis n, *read* Nees in
" 238, " 10, for *ocreata*, read *ocreatus*

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